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# A LEBANON COUNTY OLD TIME BACKWOODS PREACHER

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BY  
PROF. H. H. SHENK  
ANNVILLE, PA.

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REV. MOSES DISSINGER

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# A Lebanon County Old Time Backwoods Preacher

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By PROF. H. H. SHENK

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The morning following the most tragic night of American History was one long to be remembered in the city of Philadelphia. The strict orders of the Great War Secretary had put all suspicious places under the strictest surveillance. Excited crowds surged back and forth ready to wreak swift mob vengeance upon any who might appear to be accessories after the fact to the awful tragedy of the murder of the great Emancipator.

It was at this time that a young man, destined to become an honored member of the Lebanon bar, appeared upon the streets, eager for all the news that the bulletin boards might furnish. While reading the bulletin in front of the office of the Philadelphia Press, then edited by the Hon. John W. Forney, Secretary of the United States Senate, some one tapped him on the shoulder, called him by name, and asked him to interpret to him in German the news regarding President Lincoln. As they were thus conversing an angry crowd gathered, fearing that the German tongue was being used to conceal facts regarding the crime, assumed a menacing and threatening attitude. The young man, therefore, explained in the English tongue that he was merely interpreting the news to a German preacher who was a staunch Union man, thus saving himself and the preacher from serious embarrassment.

This interesting story from the pen of Charles M. Zerbe, Esq., for he was the young man who served as interpreter, seems to me a fitting introduction to an account of the career



of one of the most interesting, most talked of, most original and most forceful men brought into prominence by Lebanon County during the Nineteenth Century. Had the Philadelphia crowd known of this preacher's services to the party of Lincoln during the campaign of 1864, his loyalty would never have been called into question. No man ever better embodied in a few phrases the popular thought of a large portion of our population than this rough-hewn preacher, who, while serving his appointment in Lancaster County, thus expressed himself at a meeting in Elizabethtown; Des rebeldom oy hut gluck, der Jeff Davis, hut es aus ge breed: und dar alt mischt gluck, der Jeff Davis, hut es aus ge breed: und dar alt muscht hauna, der Buchanan, hut es noch gar gefeed'rt. (This rebel egg was laid by that old dunghill chicken, Calhoun; the old dunghill cluck, Jeff Davis, hatched it out: and that old dunghill rooster, Buchanan, fed it.) Others had expressed practically the same idea before, but never was it driven home to the people with such sincerity and force as from the lips of plain Moses Dissinger.

This paper is not an attempt to express judgment upon human conduct. It is not an effort to evaluate methods of religious work; it is an endeavor to state facts that may be of sufficient interest to be read, and that may be valuable enough withal to be preserved in the historic annals of this county. In order to get a proper view of the characteristics of the times in which Dissinger grew to manhood I quote the following from the Reminiscences of Rev. Wm. Yost, a preacher of the Evangelical Association. "During the summer of 1825 a campmeeting of the Evangelical Association was held in the woods belonging to a Mr. Ernst, about ten miles Northeast of Womelsdorf. Mr. Ernst had been led to Christ by the itinerant preachers a few years previously. This particular meeting was a memorable one, as the camp was destroyed by an ungodly and drunken mob, at the head of which was a Christless Minister. The meeting began on Monday, May 29, and under the unctious and powerful preaching of that period the Grace of God became so overwhelming that sinners fell prostrate, crying aloud for mercy and forgiveness, . . . Some of the mob, raised to a pitch of malicious frenzy, fell upon those who, under conviction, were calling for deliverance from



sin and guilt, and dragged them to a house nearby where a godless physician was at hand to restore the sin sick souls by bleeding and sprinkling cold water upon their faces,—a futile performance for healing wounds inflicted by the sword of the spirit."

On Thursday night, while the Rev. David Manwiller was preaching, the crisis came. The infuriated mob, wielding clubs and pitchforks and hurling stones, rushed in upon the meeting, broke in pieces the preacher's stand, leveled the tents, and scattered the fires, thereby leaving the woods in darkness.

Some of the campers were badly injured. Having broken up the meeting, the cursing mob took possession of the ground and held it through the night.

This example of the troublous times in which Dissinger was reared serves to explain some of his characteristics as a religious polemic, for the camp-meeting incident referred to, occurred one year before his birth and, except in details, was not an unusual one, for the writer's grandfather, who was born ten years before Dissinger, often referred to the fact that rowdies in those primitive, frontier-like days broke up camp-meetings as part of the crass pleasure of their drunken revelries.

In the first half of the Nineteenth Century, and even later, there existed great rivalry between distant towns. This rivalry found varied expressions, but the most common was that of pugilistic effort. The town that could put forth the best prize-fighter was accorded the County championship, and the leader who thus covered the little town with glory was given the honored designation of "town bully."

During Dissinger's early days Schaefferstown was thus honored through his successful fisticuffs, and thus his name and the reflected honor of his native town spread far and wide. Before he was eighteen years of age he had fought seventeen times, and seventeen times had he increased his fame by victory, but according to his own version the seventeenth was the hardest, and "Mose" undoubtedly felt great relief when his rival confessed defeat.

Henry Stetzel in his brief sketch of Dissinger's life says:

"Moses liked to be where merry, wild pranks were being played, where brandy was drunk in abundance, and where boisterous dancing, running, jumping was going on—in short, where whiskey flowed freely, so that men and brutes could fight without let or hindrance, and where shame and decency were forgotten. When he returned from such a gathering at any time of the night, he would raise a *hullabulloo* with his shouts, and strike fences and houses with his stick, so that all the people awoke from sleep and all the watch dogs in Schaefferstown began to yelp. Of course, people would often ask the cause of this ado, 'Ha' was the answer, 'What should it be! Es is der Mose! This answer, "it is Mose," soon silenced both human folks and dogs."

But Dissinger was destined to win more honorable fame than that to be achieved in the ring. Growing in influence at this time was a new religious body founded by Jacob Albright, who was born in this County in 1759, and whose leadership brought about the first Conference of the Evangelical Association at Muhlbach on the fifteenth and sixteenth of November, 1807.

Under the preaching of a member of this association, Dissinger became converted, and with characteristic zeal and enthusiastic energy addressed himself to the task of reconstructing his life upon a new and higher basis. From the first he was unconventional and apparently oblivious of his surroundings, was wont to pray aloud even when at work, it being recorded by Stetzel (already quoted) that while digging for a cellar, with every shovelful of dirt thrown out he would cry out "Oh God, give me grace!"

Thus it was that his great energies were given honorable and legitimate direction: and he soon felt a call to the Ministry of the Evangelical Association. He was licensed in the year 1853, and entered the active service a year later when at the Pottsville Conferences, held in February of that year, he was received as a preacher on trial. He was ordained as Deacon in the year 1856 at the Allentown Conference, presided over by Bishop Seybert. In 1859 he was ordained an Elder.

For a period of twenty-five years Rev. Dissinger preached

in the East Pennsylvania Conference, having been stationed as follows:

1856, Lancaster Circuit of Lebanon District (with C. Gingrich) F. Krecher, P. E.

1857, Lehigh Circuit of Philadelphia District (with W. L. Reber) C. Meyer, P. E.

1858, Schuylkill Circuit of Orwigsburg District, S. Neltz, P. E.

1859, Ordained Elder, Re-appointed to Schuylkill Circuit of Orwigsburg District

1860, Lehigh Circuit of Lehigh District, S. Neltz, P. E.

1861, Re-appointed to Lehigh Circuit of Lehigh District.

1862, Womelsdorf Circuit of Lebanon District, S. Neltz, P. E.

1863, Lancaster Circuit of Lebanon District (with S. S. Chubb.)

1864, Re-appointed to Lancaster Circuit of Leb. District (with P. Focht.)

1865, Philadelphia Station of Phila. Dist., (L. Snyder, P. E.)

1866, Re-appointed to Philadelphia Station, S. Neltz, P. E.

1867, Allentown Station of Allentown District, J. Yeakel, P. E.

1868, Re-appointed to Allentown Station, J. Yeakel, P. E.

1869, Carbon Circuit of Allentown District, J. Yeakel, P. E.

1870, Weissport, Station, Allentown District, J. Yeakel, P. E.

1871, After an absence of two years returned to Allentown Station of Allentown District, S. Neltz, P. E.

1872, Fleetwood Circuit of Reading District, G. T. Haines, P. E.

1873, Fleetwood Station of Reading District, Fleetwood and Lyons having been made a station by the Conference.

1874, Pleasant Valley Circuit of Easton District, J. Yeakel, P. E.

1875, Re-appointed to Pleasant Valley Circuit of Easton District, T. Bowman, P. E.

1876, (In this conference Rev. Dissinger was appointed a member of the committee on Quarterly conference records) Slatington Circuit of Allentown District, S. Neltz, P. E.

1877, Re-appointed to Slatington Circuit of Allentown District, S. Neltz, P. E.

1878, (Member of Committee on Ways and Means), Slatington Station, Allentown District, C. K. Fehr, P. E.

In this conference, held at Allentown, Feb. 26, 1879, Bishop Dubbs presiding, he was granted his credentials and joined the Kansas Conference, to which he belonged until his death on the twenty-fifth day of January, 1883.

If Whitefield is to be held in grateful remembrance for his work in spite of strenuous opposition in New England: if Cartwright is to be honored because he voiced the religious sentiment of the frontier democracy in the West, if Sundays' work received the indorsement of the Governors of great Commonwealths and of a President of the United States, should not Lebanon County honor the man who in natural ability was the equal of any of these evangelists? With a power over an assemblage surpassed by none, and with a native sense of humor equalled by few, his use of Penn'a German phrases and idioms has never been surpassed in effectiveness.

Let a life long friend, Rev. Wm. Yost, give his opinion of this unusual personage:

"He was a unique character, an extraordinary man, both in body and mind, gifted with tireless energy, an original, peculiar personage, the like of which our church has never had and never again will have in its ministry. I knew him well, Our cradles stood only a few miles apart, and we were intimately acquainted and close friends, especially from the time of our conversion. At quarterly meeting and revival meetings in my home church, he would always make my father's home his stopping place. His education having been very limited, he could neither read nor write. After his conversion he recognized the necessity of learning to read the Word of God. He at once resolved to use all the time he could spare from his daily work in learning to read. When stopping at my father's house. I would instruct him for hours in the Word of God. In a short time he could read tolerably well. At writing he never made much progress. I doubt whether he ever wrote a letter."

"His enthusiasm at revivals and campmeetings knew no bounds. Without any intermission he kept on singing, praying, shouting and working with penitents at campmeetings and quarterly meetings from morning till night, and during the night

until the sun arose, being gifted with unusual powers of physical endurance."

"He soon became known throughout the church as a very singular man, and everywhere people came in crowds to see and hear this marvelous preacher. He hurled divine truth with the force of a Titan. He was as bold as a lion, and knew no fear. He was gifted with a marvelous memory. What he read and heard his memory retained, and he could use the knowledge acquired in his own peculiar manner . . . What he learned from others was so mingled up with the product of his own mind that it seemed to come from its native mint."

"Though scarcely able in the first years of his Ministry to read his text correctly, yet would he preach with such fluency, originality, and power that it was a marvel to all who heard him. . . .

"He was much given to prayer, spending hours on his knees reading the Bible and studying his sermons. Wherever he was staying, when the time for going to the service had arrived, he would withdraw for secret prayer, saying, 'I must talk with the Father before going to Meeting.' It was his custom to call prayer talking with the Father." "He had a marvelous gift in prayer. I doubt whether I ever heard the like of his prayers. I heard him pray in houses of worship and at campmeetings until the place was shaken and the people simultaneously sprang to their feet while shouts of joy and cries for mercy filled the place. At family worship where he had lodged for the night, he would pray until every converted member of the family was either leaping for joy or shouting aloud the praises of God. He frequently made the remark, the devil must be whipped before breakfast. He will then easily stay whipped all day! In company with him at campmeetings, when the time approached that he was to preach he would say to me, 'Let us go out in the woods. We must talk with the Father. I am to preach and you know I am only one of the Lord's sprinkling cans: if He don't fill it with living water, fresh from under the Throne, I am walking around the garden endeavoring to water the Lord's plants with an empty can and the devil would just laugh at me. I can only give to the people what the Lord gives me."

"Brother Dissinger's sermons on regeneration and on the necessity of man making preparation for his eternal salvation were always of a solemn nature, more free from his humorous and rude expressions. . . . I heard him preach on these subjects

in which he would quote from ninety to one hundred and thirty passages of Scripture, to substantiate his assertions, mentioning book, chapter and verse, and reciting them word for word without the use of notes. His talent in this direction was extraordinary. I never heard the like of it from any other man."

Rev. Mr. Ybst then gives illustrations to show his mastery of difficult situations. Once at the end of the Conference year, in speaking of his own experience and how the Lord had supplied his wants, he said:

"The Conference Year is now at an end, and there is considerable of a shortage in my salary, but that doesn't trouble me. I don't lose any sleep over that; the Father has always cared for Mose, and will do so at this time. Sometimes the pasture has been rather scant but at other times I have been in clover up to my knees. Now when I am done preaching, it is an easy thing for Father K. to step up like a man and pay ten dollars, his son John will put five on top of that, and his son Jake, who never was afraid of a dead snake, will fork out five dollars also and others will follow suit."

"When the collection was counted and he placed the seventy-seven dollars in his pocket he said, "Praise the Lord brethren, the Father always cares for Mose."

"His sense of humor and his sarcasm was manifest on numerous occasions. At a campmeeting where he knew members were much opposed to fashions he preached from the text, "Deliver us from evil," he said: "You will observe that these words do not apply to the ungodly who are as full of evils as a dog is of flees, but to the Christians, and teaches that they have evils from which they must be delivered. Here is pride by which some, especially women, so transform themselves that they look anything else than human beings, and frighten horses on the road."

When through with this point, which brought out loud amens, he said; "Here is another evil, the greatest of all and the root of all. It is stinginess." Now there were no shouts of amen. The preacher had struck a discordant note. But he went after them, "hammer and tongs." "Brethren, what's the matter? Why don't you shout amen? When I preached about pride you shouted amen as if your throats would open, now when I preach about stinginess, the highest of all evils;



you hang your heads, and pinch your lips so closely together that a man could not drive a hog bristle through with a sledge hammer."

It is related when Bishop Esher first preached to the East Penna Conference in his usual sedate and deliberate manner, Rev. Neitz asked Rev. Dissinger what he thought of the new Bishop. Very quickly came a characteristic answer, "Well, Neitz, the cow gives good milk but lets it down rather slowly."

When at the Conference which met in Allentown in February 1865, it was announced that Rev. Dissinger was appointed to the intelligent German Congregation in Philadelphia, there was much doubt expressed as to how he could adapt himself to urban customs. When his name was called out on this occasion he paused for a short time, and then asked the Bishop whether that meant him. "Yes, that means you," answered the Bishop. "All right," said Dissinger, who at once leaped over the altar railing and took his seat at the side of his presiding elder.

As to his success in Philadelphia I quote the following from his friends' statement: "I called at the parsonage (in Philadelphia) and found him at home and in good spirits, expressing himself as well pleased with the outlook. Being desirous to see some of the prominent members we went to the business part of the city and called upon brother T., in his business place."

"He greeted us very cordially and pointed us to seats, and immediately expressed himself as highly pleased with the outlook of church affairs, that Brother Dissinger was doing remarkably well, giving general satisfaction, and having the church already crowded with hearers; that yesterday they had to place chairs and benches into the aisles to accommodate the people; that the services were very spiritual and satisfying, and that the outlook was very encouraging. He then turned to Brother Dissinger and said: "But Brother Dissinger you must cloth yourself differently. Your clothing will do among the farmers in the country but not for the city. It is expected that a city pastor should clothe himself accordingly. You shall, however, have no concern about this, it is all ar-

ranged. Next Sunday is Palm Sunday and we then expect a good sermon from you appropriate to the festal day, and for this occasion you shall have a new suit of clothing. I am glad you have come, for we will now go to Bro. Von G's clothing establishment have the cloth selected and the suit measured. After this was attended to, he took us to a hat store, and selected one of the best silk stove-pipe hats. Having returned to the parsonage, he exclaimed, "My, what a suit, I never expected to wear such a suit and I never had such a hat on my head before!"

"He then inquired quite earnestly, "what did Bro. T. say that next Sunday was?" Palm Sunday'. I answered. "Palm Sunday," 'Palm Sunday' he exclaimed. 'What kind of a Sunday is that? They must have curious Sundays here in Philadelphia. I never heard of such a Sunday. I am to preach a Palm Sunday sermon and don't know what it means. I am completely lost. Can you help me out?"

His friend did help him out, explaining the meaning of the day and suggesting a text which Dissinger characterized as "a bully text."

Rev. Yost left the city to attend to his weekday and Sabbath duties, returning the morning after Dissinger's Palm Sunday sermon. I found him at home and remarkably pleased over his success. "He said I should have seen the commotion in the church, the shouting, weeping, laughing, clapping of hands, and the many hallelujahs and then said: Never in my life did I preach better.

"Die watta hen nicht stharrick genug rous komma kenna, sie hen botzelbaum ivver anan'r schloga missa."

(The words could not get out fast enough; they had to turn somersault over each other.)

At the close Brother T. came drying the tears, saying, "Thank God, Brother Dissinger, such a Palm Sunday Sermon was never preached in Philadelphia before. Come to my store tomorrow. You shall also have a dozen white pocket handkerchiefs."

When brother Dissinger had served the limit I met him at the conference session and inquired how it went at the end.

His significant answer was. "The Devil is whipped, over one hundred converted, and I have \$1200 in my pocket."

Dissinger recognized his eccentricities. He once said: "I can not preach like my brethren. When a carpenter I used to hew close to the line, and so I must do in my preaching, whatever knots there are in the way. I once tried to preach like my brethren, but my experience was that of little David when he thought he would like to fight the big mouthed blasphemer in Saul's armor. He soon found out that if he were to fight in Saul's armor instead of slaying the giant, he would cut off his own head. But with the weapon to which he was adapted he knocked in the gable end of the big sinner. Only with the weapons the Lord has given me can I whip the devil, even if he does come upon me with stilts as big as a three story house."

Once at least Dissinger preached at a General Conference of his denomination. It was at Naperville, Ill., in Oct. 1871. Rev. Wm. Nast, of the Methodist church, who was present in the interest of a union of the churches, was impressed with the Lebanon Countain's remarkable power, and said to a friend: "What a wonderful man you have, I have never heard his equal. Certainly we have no man in our church like him."

In one of the circuits travelled by Dissinger there was an independent preacher, not connected with any organization, who was accused of drunkenness. On an occasion in which a number of this man's followers were present, Dissinger relieved himself of the following: "If you were not such a low and ungodly people you would feel ashamed to have such a drunken vagabond for your preacher. I will take a rag, dip it in whiskey and drag it on the road for ten miles, and I will bet anything that your drunken priest will soon get the scent of it and will chase after it like a hound after a fox, and you fellows all after him, for you would all like to suck at the whiskey rag. In a short time Dissinger had driven the preacher out of the neighborhood."

Dissinger's sense of humor was one of his striking characteristics. But there is an incident related in which the joke was turned on him, and that in the city of Lebanon, Rev.

Johnston of the Reformed church once met him on the street, and said, "Mose, we are going to put a cross on our church." "Is that so," said Mose, "Why don't you put a mule there?" "We were considering that," said the Reformed Clergyman, but we concluded that you would be too heavy."

During his early ministry he was invited to preach in Millerstown, Lehigh county. Here, as at many places in the country, toughs conspired to interfere with the services, and the brethren were anxious to see whether the visiting preacher was master of the situation. Hardly had "Mose" begun preaching when a general disturbance was begun by loud talking and boisterous laughing. Suddenly the preacher directed his attention to the mischief-makers and relieved his mind of "a lecture" which loses altogether too much of its original Pennsylvania German force through translation.

"Horcht a mul ihr Kerls dort hinna! An eich is alles Hund was an eich is except die Haut. Eich felht juscht noch en Hundshaut, dann Kent M'r sehne was ihr seid. Wann ihr en Menschaut uf eich het wiss't m'r besser was ihr seid, awer so meant mer noch ihr wart Mencha. Ihr seid so voll Deifel as die Gadarener war. Eich will ich now saga was ihr zuduh het; Ruhig miss't ihr sei odder ich Kumm nunner und schmeiss eich zu der dihr naus das ihr die heils verbrecht. Ich Kann e'n halb dutzen so Bershtlen wir ihr leddere. Dissinger is my nam und wan d'rs mir net glaub't bleib't juscht steht outside wan die versamling aus is no will ich eich weissa."

("Listen, you fellows back there; you are entirely dog, every part of you, except the skin. You need only a dog's skin to let the people see what you are. If you didn't have a human skin on you, we'd know you better; but as it is, people still think you are men. I did not know that there are any of those accursed Gaderenes here in Lehigh county. You are as full of devils as was the Gaderene. I'll tell you now what you will have to do; you must keep quiet or I'll come down and throw you out of doors that you'll break your necks. I can lck half a dozen such stuck-up chaps as you are. Dissinger is my name! And if you don't believe me, just stand outside when the meeting is over, and I will show you.")

Then he turned to the well behaved in the audience and

with fine humor said: 'Es sin aber ah orlich a Leit do wu komma sin Gottes Word zu hera. Eich will ich rota eir seishtell gut zu verwahra for wann die Diefel mol ans denna Gadarener fahra in eier sei so verrecka sie gewiss all" (But there are many orderly people here too, who have come to hear the word of God. I would advise you to secure your hog stables, for if the devils ever should leave those Gadarenes and enter your hogs they will certainly die, every one of them.)

Scarcely had he said this when there entered a man who neglected to take off his hat. Him Mose addressed as follows: "Un' du alter Sinder du duscht die Hut vum Kop, odder ich will dich mannier lerna wann du noch kenna hoscht, wie m'r sich betragt on so em' a Platz." (And you old sinner take off your hat or I'll teach you manners, if you have none yet. I will show you how to behave in a place like this.)

On another occasion young men disturbed the meeting by frequently going in and out of the meeting-house. This "Mose" could stand no longer. Turning to the young ladies of the congregation, he said (if a not too literal translation will be accepted in lieu of the original): "Young ladies, my advice to you is not to marry those young men. They're not well. They have weak kidneys. They'll die young."

But in disciplining the rowdies Dissinger could not always depend upon mental acumen and sharpness of tongue. At a campmeeting held in Leigh county not far from Cata-squa a crowd of drunken toughs, evidently bent upon having a good time and incidentally testing "Mose's" mettle, for his reputation always preceded him, attempted to break up the meeting. Approaching the place of meeting through the dark woods, they drove the worshipers before them, when "Mose" thundered out: "Stand your ground, brethren; don't retreat any further." He then seized the leader of the gang, who at once bit the dust with a vengeance. Seizing the next intruder, he called the brethren to use clubs, advice wholly unnecessary since the rowdies began to disperse when "Mose" had sent the third victim sprawling to the ground. This savored of Peter Cartwright's experience when the pioneer preached of the

west, in his autobiography, tells us how he found it necessary to use physical strength against a drunken mob.

Like more recent evangelists, Dissinger preached against the formalities of worship and the lifeless and inactive church members. Once, as he was doing this, two men arose and walked out, whereupon "Mose," quick as a flash, said: "I have before this seen dogs that had been lying around the stove jump up and run out when boiling water was splashed upon them."

"Mose" liked a lively prayer meeting and once upon occasion gave an exhortation, in which he said: "You croak like a set of old mill wheels when there is not water enough to run them properly." He admonished converted people not to remain in a lifeless church where there are no prayer meetings and whose members are mostly wicked people. "The Bible compares the wicked to swine and the converted to sheep. Now, swine and sheep don't suit together. Swine like to wallow in dirt, while sheep do not. Swine eat rotten flesh, while sheep live on clean food; and where so many hogs are, there is scarcely anything but hog feed, which the sheep cannot eat, and so these have to starve. The hogs multiply faster, too, than the sheep. Moreover, the hogs devour the young sheep. Thus the hogs, in a short time would prevail, so that no sheep could live among them. Therefore, such living together is unbecoming." By this not-too-elegant comparison of the high church membership to swine did the preacher illustrate his point.

Yes, Dissinger's conduct in this particular is little open to criticism when we take into consideration the action of the Conference of the Evangelical Assoc., in session at Millersburg, Dauphin County, in Feb., 1863. This conference adopted resolutions offered by a committee of which Rev. Neitz, Presiding Elder for the Lebanon District, was chairman, which resolution read in part as follows:

Resolved, That we consider African Slavery, a political, moral and social evil, the product of hell, the sum of all baseness, and according to the testimony of Johnson, Holt and Brownlow the only true original cause of the present ungodly and hellish rebellion.



"Resolved, That we declare ourselves to be unconditionally in favor of the preservation of the Union and the suppression of the rebellion."

Many were the attacks made by this Sunday of the east on fashion. On one occasion, while attacking the evil tendencies of extravagance in dress, the preacher's wife entered wearing a new hat. "Mose" suddenly stopped, and then exclaimed: "And there comes my old woman with a corner cupboard on her head." The explanation being that Mrs. Dissinger unsuccessfully importuned her husband to buy her a hat, whereupon she sold an old-fashioned corner cupboard in order to satisfy her millinery tastes.

At a campmeeting in Northampton county a clergyman of another persuasion took a seat on the side intended for women, the rules of that day, as earlier in New England, demanding a segregation of the sexes. During the singing he would not rise; during prayer he would not kneel, nor would he take off his high hat, thus showing utter disregard for the rules of the meeting. The next day "Mose" preached upon observing proper order in worship. "But I don't want you to do as that stupid ox did yesterday, who sat among the women wearing his stovepipe hat, who did not rise for singing, nor kneel for prayer, nor even to take off his hat. I don't want you to behave as that ox behaved."

None of the latter-day evangelists surpassed Dissinger in his trenchant remarks on drinking, although it is altogether likely that the drunkard was attacked more then and the institution less. "Mose" Dissinger's characterization of the drunkard has passed into Pennsylvania German tradition and folklore and is almost classic.

"Sehnt juscht amol die Sauflodel a. Die hot der Deifel so erschrecklich verhaust, dass mer meent, sie kenta ihr leb-dag nimme zurecht gebrocht werra. Viel davon hen net juscht ihr menschlich Ehrgefühl fortgsoffa, so dass sie alles Schlechtes un Dreckiches duh kenna, was der dreckig Helldiefel hawa will, dass sie duh solla, ohna dass sie sich schaem-ma; awer sie hen ah noch ihra Verstand versoffa. Es is jo bal nix meh an ihna was zum a rechta mensch gheert. Der Deifel hot sie jo ganz zu seina Schuh-

butzerlumpa gemacht un hot sie bal all naerrisch un wiet g gemacht, un en grösser Deht vun ihna hen bal Leib un Seel versoffa; un so saufa sie fort bis der Deifel sie in de Hell nunner holt, wu all die Sauflodel hiekumma. Nau, guckt sie juscht amol recht a, wie sie auswenning aussehna. Sie hawa Nasa wie rota Pfefferkep, Ohra wie Fastnachtkucka, Beich wie Fesser, un Make G'sichter wie die Fichs, wann sie Weesh-pa fressa; un bei all dem werd immer noch rudlos g'soffa, un springa noch der Drambottel wie die Bullfresch uf die rote Lumpa. Wann mer net wisst dass Jesus Christus so niedertraechtige Menscha wie die sin schun agenomma het un noch rechtschaffna Menscha aus ihna gemacht het, so kent mer ken Hoffnung haww dass so versoffena Dramratta vum Saufdeifel erloest kenta werra; awer Jesus Christus hot Gnade erworwa for alla Sinder, un do sin ah die, wu im Schlamm der Sinda ganz dief versunka sin, net ausgeschlossa. Darch die Kraft des Evangeliums kann der verdarwerscht Sauflodel errett werra un Kraft bekomma dass er im a Strom Dram, der em bis an's Maul geht, schwimma kent, ohna dass er Luscht hei, davun zu drinka; un wann's em der Deifel ah abieta deet, so kent er darch die Gnadenkraft des Evangeliums dem Deifel widersteh, un ken Saufdeifel in der Hell kent ihn zu dem verfluchta Dramsaufa zwinga. Darum bekehrt euch! Jesus Christus kann euch helfen."

("Just look at the drunkard! These the devil has ruined so fearfully that one might think they could never in a whole lifetime be restored. Many of them have not only drunk away all human sense of honor, so that they can do anything mean and dirty that the dirty devil in hell wants them to do, without feeling any shame; they have also guzzled away their understanding. There is scarcely anything of a real man left in them. The devil has made them his shoe-cleaning rags. . . . Now, take a good look at their outward appearance. They have noses like red peppers, ears like Fasnacht cakes, bellies like barrels, and they make faces like foxes eating wasps; but in spite of it all, they go on drinking, they jump for the rum bottle like bullfrogs on red rags. If we did not know that Jesus Christ has received such degraded men and made honorable men of them, we could not hope that such drunken rum-rats could ever be delivered from the devil of drink. But Jesus Christ has obtained grace for all sinners, and even those who are the most

deeply in the mire of sin are not excluded. By the power of the gospel the most wretched drunkard can be saved and gifted with power, so that he could swim in a stream of rum reaching to his mouth without any desire to drink of it; and even if the devil should offer it to him he could, by the power of grace in the gospel, resist the devil, and no devil in hell could force him to the accursed drinking of rum. Be ye, therefore, converted! Jesus Christ can help you.")

As Dissinger was in his prime during the civil war, it is natural that he should draw illustration from the field of battle. "When the gospel is proclaimed by converted ministers [the high-church preachers being considered unconverted] it is just like a battery with which fortifications are shot down. With this battery we can batter in the gable end of hell, so that all the dark spirits of hell tremble with fear and terror, and the hairs of old Lucifer himself stand on end. But it must be preached by men whom God has called and equipped with the unction of the Holy Spirit: men who are not afraid to preach the pure truth, that sinners may be converted to God and God's kingdom may be extended, that devils may be driven out and the devil's kingdom destroyed. Men of this sort are the good Lord's sharpshooters, who, with this battery made up entirely of rifle guns, always hit the nail on the head and shoot down all accursed rebel forts, and in the end will capture old Jeff and his entire hellish crew. These gain one victory after another. Then, too, there is often a mighty cry of victory, and one jubilant shout after another, in the camp, for this is a people that can shout for joy. Many are opposed to this, which is not to be wondered at, since they never gain a victory over the devil's kingdom of sin. Those soldiers that never win a battle raise no shout of joy; but those that thunder into the devil's kingdom so that sinners are awakened and converted raise a cry of victory. Not they who lose a battle, but they who win it, can shout and exult for gladness. Satan also has respect for those who, as he knows, are led by Christ, a general who never lost a battle.

"But there are such handbox boys who know nothing of conversion and regeneration, nor care to know. They come with paper guns and paper balls [for he thus characterized those who read their sermons, to which he was, for obvious

reasons opposed], which they have bought out of school. They think they, too, can fire upon the devil and do great deeds; and when they have fired off their paper battery a few times they imagine they have shot the devil dead; but they do not know that they have not yet touched a hair of his back or of his tail. Shooting like this is fun for the devil, and where such shooting is done he will lie down at the front of the pulpit and go to sleep and snore, for he knows that no harm will be done him there. But as soon as the rifle guns thunder the eternal truth of God, like fiery balls, into the dirty, sinful camp of Satan, his sleep is at an end, and he runs like mad to save his tattered reign, for then there are reverberations in every corner of his dirty kingdom."

From all this we can see that Dissinger believed in a personal devil, and that the devil's kingdom was pretty closely associated with the confederacy; all of which reminds one of the numerous northern cartoons of civil war days in which Davis was represented as playing the role of his satanic majesty.

Dissinger on one occasion, in 1861, was preaching at Emaus, on the Lehigh circuit. A young man who professed conversion found much opposition and persecution, whereupon the preacher spoke as follows:

"Do in dem Emaus gebt's en boesondere Art Deifel; so Deifel wie's do hot hab ich mei Lebtag noch net agetroffa. Wann do en Mensch sich bekahra will, hot der Deifel gewiss so en halb Dutzend Hetzhund do, for en widder abzubringen. Do howwa im Saufhauss kenna se rumleia un Dag un Nacht saufa, un er gebt nix drum; wann sich awer eens bekehra will, do sehnt mer'n im Town rumspringa, mit ma Stock in der Hand un Haensching ah, dass er sich bal die Beh bis an die Knie abspringt, for die Seel widder abzubringa. Do geht's wie der Luther g'saht hot; wann en Herd sei im Stall an fressa sin, un mer holt ener raus un stecht sie doot, so fressa die annera fort un gucka net rum, wie's denna geht, wu doot-gstocha werd. So geht's do: do werd fortgsossa un net rumgeguckt bis drunna in der Hell. Des is Wohret, un ich fersch mich net, die Wohret zu saga, un wann der Deifel uf Stelza geloffa kumt,"

("Here in Emaus there is a particular kind of devil. Such devils as are found here I have not met in all my life. Here if a man seeks conversion, the devil certainly will set half a dozen dogs on him to drive him off. Up there, in yonder rum-hole, they can lounge about and go on drinking day and night, and he doesn't care. But if any one wishes to be converted, you can see him run about town carrying a cane and wearing gloves and almost wearing his legs to the knees, trying to lead that soul away. It happens, as Luther said, when a herd of swine is eating in a stable and you take one out and cut its throat, the rest will eat on and not even look around to see the fate of the one that is being killed. So it is here; they drink on and don't look around until they are down in hell. This is the truth, and I am not afraid to tell the truth, though the devil should come walking on stilts.")

In Allentown, after conducting a series of meetings, he said, "Now I'm going to do what the devil never in his life did, I'm going to leave Allentown."

Complaint was once made by a woman, who was a member of the church, that the ministers never called at her house. It was an open secret that the reason for this was the filthy condition of her home. Mose said he would accept her invitation to dinner and see whether he could not induce her to adopt more sanitary methods. When called upon to ask a blessing at the table, he did it in this fashion:

"Gott segen des drechich Frau; Gott segen des drechich Essen; Gott segen der arme Mose wo's essen muss!"

("God bless this dirty woman; God bless this dirty food; and God bless poor Mose, who must eat it!")

Mose Dissinger did not belong to what are commonly called the plain people, although he was plain enough in dress and speech. As he paid his respects to the high-church people, so he also attacked the denominations that adopt a particular style of dress. He said: "Whoever wishes to enter heaven must be converted to God. This is not done, as many people think. They think, if they have been baptized as adults, if they belong to the church and wear broad-brimmed hats and round-tailed coats, everything has been done that they can do to be saved and enter heaven. All who believe this cheat themselves out of their soul's salvation."

But Dissinger's fame rests not alone upon his preaching, but, like the great preacher-editor of the Knoxville Whig, Parson Brownlow, he took a deep interest in the conflict for the preservation of the Union between the States, and, as Brownlow helped Andrew Johnson to redeem Tennessee for the Union, so Dissinger helped Governor Curtin, of Pennsylvania, to carry the Keystone State for the Union cause during the dark days of the war between the north and the south. In physical courage, patriotic fervor as well as power of invective and vituperation, the Pennsylvania German was not inferior to the border-state man. In education alone did the latter surpass him, and we are in no sense giving too much elasticity to the comparison when we say that Mose Dissinger was the "Parson Brownlow of the North." We doubt whether the times can afford a closer parallel. Here, too, his conduct called forth much opposition from two distinct sources. First, there were those who opposed any mention of politics from the pulpit, although they were themselves loyal to the Union; and, secondly, there were those who were at heart southern sympathizers and they were not few in number.

Henry Stetzel, in a brief sketch of Dissinger's life, from which many incidents have been taken for this article, thus describes one of his patriotic sermons: "A certain Evangelical minister who had announced such a sermon made arrangement with Moses that the latter should speak in conclusion and that the first sermon should be brief in order to give Moses sufficient time for his closing remarks.

"Thus it was agreed. The sermon was begun, while Moses sat quite still on the pulpit. Something was said of our free government, which, with all its imperfections, is still the best in the world, and the only free, popular sovereignty on earth. Nobody, therefore, should be indifferent as to its standing or falling. 'Mose' still kept quiet. Then something was said about the injustice of the slaveholders, who keep four millions of human beings in bondage, living in abundance and wantonness on the fruits of their hard toil, and, who are now waging war to make us slaves also."

"While this was being said, a violent tremor prevailed



Moses' entire body. He began to shuffle his feet back and forth with gradually increasing rapidity and violence. He was like a race horse on the turf getting ready to start. The preacher knew that Moses was now in full trim and said 'Amen.' Instantly Moses jumped up clapped his hands and exclaimed: "God be thankful for the truth: This is the eternal truth, fresh from the shovel. So I like it, when the truth is pushed off the shovel clean and fresh."

"Further on he said: 'Thanks to God! The devil has got one more of the rebel generals. I have been thinking, if the devil minded his business, he had fetched them long ago. Perhaps he would long ago have carried off rebel Jeff, but he still has need here of such filthy, mean-spirited characters, who help him to do their accursed work.' "

Not only from the pulpit did Dissinger denounce the Davis government, but he took the stump for the Union ticket in 1864. His most famous speech during this campaign was delivered in the courthouse in the city of Lebanon on the Friday evening preceding the presidential election. Strenuous efforts were made by the local Union committee to carry the county of Lebanon for Lincoln and Johnson by a large majority, and its success in doing so may, at least partly, be attributed to the enthusiasm stirred up by Dissinger.

In this closing week of the campaign three great mass meetings were held in the city of Lebanon. On Thursday evening, November 3, an enthusiastic welcome was given Governor Curtin; the following evening Dissinger spoke; while on Saturday evening the Hon. A. J. Herr, of Harrisburg, one of the most eloquent Pennsylvanians, later Speaker of the Senate, was the principal orator; but neither the great war governor nor the eloquent lawyer could stir up the enthusiasm of the masses as did plain Mose Dissinger. He had returned from a tour of Lancaster county, where he met with some opposition in the neighborhood of Columbia. He was stoned while speaking in the open air, as was Hamilton while defending the Jay treaty; but, while Hamilton said, "In the face of such striking arguments I will retire," Dissinger turned toward the other speakers and said, "Brethren, can you stand it? I believe I can." But the stones flew too thick

and fast, and Mose and his companions retreated, whereupon Mose said, "Wann ich aber mei pishtole bei m'r het het der Deifel frisch fleesch g'hot fer sie morga esse." ("If I had only my pistol, the devil would have had fresh meat for breakfast.")

But to return to the Lebanon Meeting. The Lebanon newspapers of that day give a very inadequate account of this affair, for the local journalism then paid much less attention to the sensational than now. The Advertiser, edited by William M. Breslin, was the leading Democratic paper, and the account of the meeting was written by Daniel Musser, who resides in Lebanon and who has a distinct recollection of the meeting. Mr. Musser is an authority on matters of local history, and was for forty-five years secretary of the Union Fire Company. Mr. Musser states that Dissinger was not averse to newspaper publicity.

The Courier, a Republican newspaper, makes this comment on the meeting. "Rev. Moses Dissinger made an able Union speech in the courthouse on Friday evening, November 1. His earnest and telling hits brought down the house. The speaking was in the German language. Mr. Dissinger has been doing noble service for his country."

He spoke over a good part of Lancaster county, confirming Union men in their convictions and pricking the consciences of copperheads terribly. At some places the truths were too strong for the "cops" to bear, and they assaulted him with stones and other missiles; but he was not in that way to be turned from his duty. He continued to deliver his intellectual blows, which proved more effective than the muscular blows of the friends of Jeff.

This Lebanon courthouse address was opened with prayer, and it is related of Mose that, in his prayer, he thanked the Lord that for once he was able to get the lawyers on their knees. In this remarkable speech reference was frequently made to the secret military societies said to have been organized in Berks county to assist the confederates. For this purpose secret councils were held at night in barns, stables and other places suitable to their purpose.

Mose spoke in part as follows:

"Wisst ihr, wie mich die Rebellowertschaft in der South gemahnt? Ei, grad wie so en alte verlumpte Bäueri, wu die Fenza ball all zamma leia un alles mit Hecka un Dorna un Unkraut verwachsa is; wu ken Dohra meh an der Scheirer sin un alles leer un armselig aussicht. Am Haus sin die Fenschterscheiwa all verbrocha, wu Niemand meh wohna kann. Un wu mer ah nix Lewendiges atreffa kann as wie so en halb verhungelter Ochs uf em Mischthau, wu noch so dreckige Ströhhalma aus em Mischthau zieht un fresset, dass er nei ganz verhungert, un noch so Lemmerlich brummelt: 'Ich muss verhungera! Ich muss verhungera!' Nawa dra is noch so en alter seistall mit so era alta langriesliche Los drin, un wann sie den Ochs heert, knarrt sie mit em Riesel im Dreck; 'Hu-gu! Hu-gu!' Nau guckt amol, eb's net grad so geht in Rebelltum. Wann's Volk in der South, grad wie der halbverhungerte Ochs, ruft: 'Ich muss verhungera! Ich muss verhungera!' so knarrt der alt Jeff, die alt Sau, mit seim Sieriesel in Dreck: 'Hu-gu! Hu-gu!'"

("Do you know of what this rebel government in the south reminds me? Why, it is just like an abandoned farm, whose fences are nearly all broken down, while everything is overgrown with bushes, thorns and weeds; where the barn has no doors left and nothing within, and everything looks empty and miserable.

"At the house all the window panes are broken and no one can live there now. No living creature can be found except a half-starved ox on a dunghill, who pulls dirty straws out of the dung and eats them to save himself from dying and hunger and roars dolefully through his empty belly, I'm a-hungered! I'm a-hungered!' Nearby is an old pig stable with an old long-snouted pig in it, and when she hears the ox she grunts, with her snout in the dirt, 'Hoo'goo! Hoo'goo!' Now see whether it is not exactly the same in rebeldom. When the people of the south, just like the half-starved ox, call out, 'We are a-hungered! We are a-hungered!' old Jeff, the old hog, grunts, with his pig's snout in the dirt, 'Hoo'goo! Hoo'goo!' ")

This brought down the house and pandemonium reigned; hats and handkerchiefs flew in the air and cheer followed cheer for many minutes.

Later in his speech he said:

"Vor da nerdliche Rebels, da 'Copperheads,' da 'Golden Circle Kerls' un Kihstalloperators braucht mer sich net zu ferche for des sin lauter Cauards. Des hot mer jo g'sehna wie des Huberle in der Dscheel war in Reading; do hot jo der Captain mit d'r Heidelberger Brigeed vum 'dumma Vertel' ihn mit Gewalt rausnemma wolla. Un wie sie an die Harrisburger Brick kumma sin, do hawen's die Reading Feierleit ausgunna; dann hawa sie en paar Wasserspritzta rausgenumma un sin uf se los. Un wie die 'Copperheads' des g'sehna hen hen sie anfanga zu kreischa; 'Die Kanona kumma, Buwa! Gott im Himmel, do gebt's dota Leit!'—Nau sin sie ausnanner gsprunga; en Deel hen die Hiet velora, en Deel sin unner de Waega dorch un hen die Kep verschunna, un so sin sie all ab un heem. Vor so Cauards, wu mer mit Wasserspritzta abjaga kann, braucht mer sich net zu fercha. M'r Kenna des ganz Rebellegschwader sauwer nunner aus un bleddera."

("Of the northern rebels, the copperheads, the fellows of the Golden Circle and cow-stable operators, no one need be afraid, for they're all cowards. That was plainly seen when Huberly was in jail in Reading and the captain of the Heidelberg Brigade, of the 'Dumb Quarter,' tried to take him by force. When they reached the Harrisburg bridge they were seen by the Reading firemen, who ran out a few fire engines and advanced upon them. As soon as the copperheads saw these, they began to yell, 'The cannon are coming, boys! Good God! somebody will be killed!'"

"Then they ran in all directions. Some lost their hats; some ran under wagons and skinned their heads, and all hurried off and made for home. Of such cowards, who can be driven off by fire engines, no one need be afraid. We can give the entire rebel squadron a clean, downright licking.")

After the war Dissinger continued preaching in Pennsylvania until 1879, when he joined the Kansas Conference, where he died in 1883, having reached nearly threescore years.







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